

Final Report Federal State Marketing Improvement Program

The project *Strengthening Direct Marketing Channels: Programs to Develop and Enhance Farmers' Markets* was approved on September 2000. The project goal was to identify strategies that strengthen the farmers' market direct marketing channel between producers and consumers of horticultural crops in Oklahoma. The specific objectives of this study are: 1) to examine consumer preferences among various marketing channels, including direct marketing in Oklahoma, 2) to analyze the impact of various demographic variables on purchasing decisions, 3) to make recommendations based on the results, on how to market produce more effectively at direct market outlets.

Questionnaires were developed to survey growers/vendors at statewide markets, market managers and customers of the markets. After several delays the Oklahoma State University (OSU), Institutional Review Board (IRB), approved the Farmers market customer survey in September 2001. With such a late start many of the smaller markets in the state had already seen the majority of their consumers and products diminish, so the group concentrated its efforts on larger markets in the state and handed out 307 surveys during September and October. The group then targeted different markets and surveyed customers from May to July the following year in hopes of getting representatives from large to small markets and different growing seasons. The total number of surveys handed out to customers at statewide Farmers Markets was 612, with 395 returning a completed survey for review.

Market managers were mailed packets containing surveys to be handed out to grower/vendors at their markets and surveys for the individual market managers. These surveys were sent after the first of the year in an effort to contact the growers during their "down time" of the year. We feel that many of the market managers did not mail or hand out the customer survey and feel that the return rate will be skewed. Only 64 of the total 425 producer surveys were returned. The group mailed 21 surveys to market managers statewide and received 9 of those back.

Initial results from the surveys show that the demographic characteristics of farmers market consumers are as follows: 79 percent are female, 68 percent are between 36-65 years old, 52 percent has at least an undergraduate education, 43 percent has annual income between \$40,000-\$79,999, mostly (43 percent) come from suburban area and about 50 percent of the respondents have been visiting the farmers market for at least 4 years.

The demographic characteristics of farmers market producers are as follows: 62 percent are female, 71 percent are between 36-65 years old, 53 percent has at least undergraduate education, 43 percent has annual income between \$40,000-\$79,999, mostly come from rural area, and on average they have been selling through the farmers markets for 4.5 years.

A market manager resource guide (attachment) was compiled after the data from the manager's survey were reviewed. This booklet was handed out to all existing market managers and is mailed to those individuals who contact the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry or Kerr Center and are interested in starting a Farmers Market in their community. The

information was also presented during a 3-hour market manager-training workshop during the 2002 Future Farms conference sponsored by the Kerr Center for sustainable agriculture and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry. Over 35 interested individuals attended the workshop and learned about direct marketing programs existing markets are using along with how to get a market started in a community.

A major component to any farmers' market is having an adequate number of growers at the market each week with produce to sell. The information gathered from the surveys taken from existing growers/vendors was used to create a growing for market resource guide (attachment) that was given to all existing market managers to share with individuals wishing to become new growers for their markets. The information gathered was also used to conduct grower-training seminars to teach how to get started. A site on the Eastern and Western side of the state was selected to host three sessions throughout the growing year. The first session taught what preparation goes into starting plants and preparing the seedbed, the second session was held during the middle of the market session and showed about harvesting and marketing the crops as they were picked and the final session looked at what to do after the market is over by planting cover crops and preparing for the next year. Attached also is a copy of the press release used to promote the event which limited attendance to 30 individuals per site in order to accommodate for space and allow hands on training, a flier, an agenda and list of participant who attended the seminars.

Dr. Shida Henneberry has spoke at various conferences to explain the findings of this project and has also written various reports